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ABSTRACT

China is used as a case study to examine the problem of "brain drain," the departure of skilled professionals and students from their own countries to live and work in the United States. Chinese attempts to adjust their policies for study abroad are reviewed, including proposed controls on what Chinese students study abroad, who goes abroad, and where they go. Conditions discouraging students and scholars from returning to China are also outlined. These conditions include inadequate academic infrastructures, poor and inequitable salaries, inappropriate use of scholars' skills due to inefficient bureaucracies, authoritarian political and social environments, intellectual decay, resentment of other faculty, and increasing demand for skilled workers in the United States. It is suggested that to encourage students and scholars to repatriate, home countries should take more responsibility for encouraging their nationals to return home by making home-country employment attractive, making ongoing training available, providing opportunities for them to respond creatively to home-country needs, and creating organizations and publications for the professional and intellectual communities. Host countries are encouraged to assist returning professionals through continued training opportunities, relevant education, and opportunities to apply their training to home-country issues. Examples of successful repatriation efforts are noted. (MSE)

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Why aren't Third-World scholars going home? Focus on adjustments in China's overseas policies

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Using China as a case study, this article examines the continuing problem of "brain drain"--the departure of skilled professionals and students from their own country. This article explains Chinese attempts to adjust their overseas study policies in view of the "brain drain" and then looks behind these policies in order to identify the reasons students and scholars from China, and other Third-World countries, often do not return home. Suggestions are offered which might encourage students and scholars to repatriate.

Upon completion of my studies in the United States, I will return to my home country to share the valuable experience of studying in a foreign university. I plan to become acquainted, then, with the technological industry in my country and be able to contribute with [sic] the development and exploration of human and technical resources.

Statement by an applicant to Macalester College. January, 1988.

The statement quoted above was written by a student applying for admission to Macalester College in 1988. He is from a Third-World country to which he clearly intends to return after he completes his studies, since, as he states, he is committed to contributing to his country's development.

Such intentions are commonly expressed by international students who consider the study abroad experience an opportunity to improve their skills in order to serve their countries at some future time. However, in the course of their studies, changes occur in their thinking and many of them do not return home. This "brain drain"--the flow of skilled professionals and students from their home countries--is a continuing problem, especially for developing countries which cannot afford to lose skilled professionals. Most recently, it has been a topic of concern among Chinese officials. This concern is stated succinctly by Dr. Han Suyin, a Chinese born physician and au-

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thor: "How is the country going to advance if the best of its students are going to remain abroad?" ("Young Chinese," 1987).

Reacting to fears that Chinese students studying abroad are not returning home, the Chinese government recently issued regulations to promote their return. This paper will explain the current Chinese adjustments in overseas study policies and then look behind them to 1) identify the reasons students and scholars from China and other Third-World countries do not return home and 2) to offer suggestions from various sources which would encourage students and scholars to return home.

CHINESE OVERSEAS EDUCATION

Since the Qing dynasty in the 1870s, the Chinese have been sending students abroad for advanced training. Throughout, authorities have recognized the danger of sending their talented students to study in countries whose political systems and standard of living have differed from China's. They feared that along with the technical skills they would require, students might be "contaminated" by foreign political and social ideas (Finger & Reed, 1982).

Nonetheless, the need for technical skills outweighed Chinese fears and between 1900 and 1950 several thousand Chinese graduate students studied abroad.[1] Throughout the past several decades, the number of Chinese students overseas has peaked and plummeted depending on China's political relations with the countries to which students were sent. In the 1950s, for example, 40,000 students were sent to the Soviet Union and to Eastern Europe to acquire skills and to become familiar with Soviet models of development. However, the flow of students slowed in the 1960s as a result of political dissension between the Soviet Union and China and the isolationism of the Cultural Revolution. In the late 1960s, the number of Chinese students overseas increased slightly, most participating in exchanges to other Third-World countries. After the death of Mao ZeDong and the purge of the Gang of Four, Chinese leaders realized that in order for China to modernize quickly, Chinese scholars needed extensive contact with scholars in advanced industrial states. Since then China has been sending large numbers of students to Western Europe, Japan, and the U.S. for training emphasizing science and technology.

Between 1978 and 1988, more than 50,000 Chinese students have studied overseas in 70 countries.[2] Of this number, approximately 40,000 are government-sponsored students. Ten thousand are privately sponsored by relatives abroad. Of the 40,000 government-sponsored students, only 20,000 have returned home. Most of these returnees were visiting scholars who had finished their projects and returned quickly. Few of the

[1] All statistics in this paragraph are taken from Finger and Reed (1982).
[2] All statistics in this paragraph are taken from Pepper, 1988.

privately sponsored students have returned; however, the government does not appear to be concerned about this group since none of the proposed regulation changes apply to them. Of particular concern are the approximately 12,000 young government-sponsored scholars that have been sent abroad, of whom only 200-300 have returned. The new regulations are aimed at these students, most of whom are Ph.D. students who did not go overseas until after 1982. However, since many of these students have not fully completed their studies yet, it is too early to know just what percentage will actually decide to remain abroad and not return to China.

In the spring of 1988, much confusion took place among Chinese scholars in the U.S. and their American sponsors as a result of reports of the Chinese government's intention to drastically reduce the number of students permitted to study abroad. Although in one breath Chinese officials publicly denied any such change in policy, in another they confirmed it. For example, Huang Xinbai, a member of the State Education Commission, in an interview with the *Beijing Review* insisted, "Sending students to study abroad is China's long standing policy which remains unchanged and will never change" (*"China reaffirms"*, 1988). In what appears to be a contradictory statement, Huang Xinbai later explained, "In light of our internal situation, it is only normal to make necessary adjustments in our Policy on state-funded students studying abroad" (*"China reaffirms"*, 1988).*

A U. S. government source recently explained that such confusion is not uncommon in U.S./China relations. According to this source, the confusion stems from the fact that Chinese policy is not yet set; rather it is still being debated. He explained, "China often has trouble helping outsiders distinguish between definitive policy change and less conclusive or evolving modifications" (Pepper, 1988).

In any case, Chinese leaders want to ensure that overseas Chinese students and scholars return home after completing their studies. Their concern has increased within the past few years as scholars and students have increasingly requested extensions in their time studying abroad.

As a result, China has begun to publicly question its study abroad policies. Recognizing the continued need for overseas training, Chinese leaders are not decreasing the numbers of students overseas. Rather, they are proposing controls on who goes abroad, where they go, what they study, and for how long.

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* Editor's note: The *New York Times* (Sunday, August 13, 1989) reported that China has announced again its intention to significantly reduce the number of students it will send abroad, concentrating instead on improving its own doctorate programs.

PROPOSED CHANGES IN CHINA'S OVERSEAS STUDY POLICIES

According to the Chinese State Education Commission, overseas study abroad will remain an important feature in China's development; however, the commission is proposing several "adjustments" in policy (Pepper, 1988). The first adjustment is in choice of major. Students will be encouraged to focus on applied fields, particularly those needed for industrial development. Second, more scholars already holding Ph.D.s will be sent abroad and the number pursuing master's degrees will be decreased. Undergraduates will not be sent abroad at all, since they can receive appropriate eduction in China. Third, more students will be sent to Europe where few have gone thus far.*

How do these adjustments ensure that scholars will return to China after a sojourn overseas? The relationship is not always obvious. For example, the first adjustment, a change in majors, does not appear to relate at all. However, the second adjustment, sending older scholars overseas instead of undergraduates or master's degree students is more obviously related, since older scholars are likely to have strong ties to their families and their country and are therefore more likely to return home. The third adjustment, sending more scholars to Europe, may indeed result in increased numbers returning home. Since unemployment rates are high among professionals in Europe, Chinese professionals would have a difficult time finding employment there (Wang, 1988).

CONDITIONS WHICH DISCOURAGE STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS FROM RETURNING HOME

The conditions in China that discourage scholars from returning home are similar to those identified by scholars from other Third-World countries who have returned home after studying overseas. In their books, *Fondness and Frustration* (1983), and *Decline and Renewal* (1986), Crauford Goodwin and Michael Nacht report on studies they conducted of overseas scholars who returned to their home countries, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, and Indonesia. The authors found much frustration among these returned scholars who complained that the skills and competencies which they had acquired at great expense and effort had decayed upon return home.

The frustrations Goodwin and Nacht and other sources have found include economic, bureaucratic, professional, interpersonal, intellectual, and emotional. The following are some of the more common:

* Editor's note: According to David Seager in the September 3, 1989 *New York Times*, Chinese leadership has recently renewed its efforts to implement these policy changes in attempt to stifle the democracy movement and the impact of Western influence on Chinese students.

1. Inadequate academic infrastructures.

Scholars complain about the inconveniences of working as scholars or researchers in institutions where the academic infrastructures are inadequate. For example, they regret the obsolete or inadequate laboratory equipment and computers, poor libraries, and inefficient telephone systems which limit or slow down their work.

2. Poor, inequitable salaries

Another frustration expressed by returning scholars is their poor salaries. Some poorly paid professionals find that they have to find supplementary employment and are thus distracted form their research by the need for additional income. As one unhappy Mexican scholar complained, "My kids can't eat books and papers" (Goodwin and Nacht, 1986).

A Brazilian graduate student studying Public Health at the University of Minnesota explained that, in Brazil, professionals keep three or four jobs just to pay the rent. This condition prevents them from excelling at any of their jobs (Rudd, 1988).

One Chinese scholar complained about the lack of equity of salaries in China. "The People who are creating economic profit are not earning what they deserve. China needs to increase income for intellectuals who contribute the most." He added angrily, "the man who sells second-hand clothes earns a higher salary than most professors or researchers (Wang 1988).

3. Inappropriate use of scholars' skills because of inefficient bureaucracies

Scholars also report that their skills are not used properly by their institutions when they return home. One Chinese scholar explained why he does not plan to return home after finishing his U.S. degree:

> *The problem is what I can do after returning. What I am learning now will definitely be wasted if I go back to my old employer in China.*

When asked if he could switch jobs he replied:

> *You know how hard it is to switch jobs in China. By the time I have made it through all the red tape, my training will be outdated. And even if I could get a transfer, there will be just as much bureaucracy in the new place. In China, the whole system is like that--some people achieve, while others make obstacles to achievement. Altogether, there is no efficiency* (Wang, 1988).

Some scholars and researchers returning form abroad do not even work in the professions in which they were trained. Goodwin and Nacht explain that this is common in decolonized countries which have a shortage of high level bureaucrats.

> *Abrupt decolonization creates one-time demands for middle-level and high-level bureaucrats and executives that tend to drain the rest of the system. During this period, pressures on the professions and disciplines are intense as the administrative temptress lures away their best.* (Goodwin and Nacht, 1986)

A Chinese scholar complained that some skilled professionals have been unable to get jobs using their skills because they do not have the right connections. "Whom you know or who your father is often becomes more important than what you've learned" (Groat, 1988).

4. Authoritarian political and social environments

Authoritarian political and social environments are another cause of discontent among scholars and researchers who are sometimes prohibited from pursuing interesting projects disapproved of by the authorities. Goodwin and Nacht explain:

> *One aspect of life in an authoritarian environment is that scientists and intellectuals may be constrained or prohibited, often frivolously, from applying their skills to problems that they perceive to be either of highest national priority or of exceptional scientific interest but that those in authority judge to be inimical to their interests. These problems may range from humanistic topics, such as questions of historical interpretation, to topics in the physical sciences that impinge on national security.* (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

5. Intellectual decay

Scholars regret the lack of a support system for innovative scholarship when they return home. The result is a decay of their intellectual skills. For example, a Turkish sociologist explained that publication in international journals was seen as demeaning and threatening to her colleagues at home. Such publications were seen as showing off. She was discouraged from publishing her scholarship internationally because in Turkey, according to her, "to love is more important than to achieve" (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

A Mexican scientist explained regretfully that, as time passed, he lost confidence in his ability to write and publish in English and consequently lost contact with the international community of scholars in his field (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

6. Resentment from other faculty members

Another source of difficulty for scholars who return home is resentment on the part of faculty members who had not studied abroad toward those who had the advantage of an American Ph.D. The result is sometimes a loss of power by the newcomers (Coleman, 1989).

7. The opportunity to stay in the U.S.

A prominent reason why scholars choose to stay in the U.S. rather than return home is the increasing demand for skilled workers in the U.S. Josef Mestenhauser, Director of the Office of International Education at the University of Minnesota, explains that the U.S., fearful of the spread of communism, first began educating students from underdeveloped countries after World War II. At this time, the U.S. and the foreign governments assumed that students would return home. More recently, foreign students have been filling open positions in the U.S., especially in engineering and health-related fields, and it is predicted that the demand for skilled workers in these fields will increase in the future (Rudd, 1988).

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENCOURAGING STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS TO RETURN HOME

What can home countries and host countries do to insure that scholars return home after studying abroad?

Home countries

A suggestion offered by Mestenhauser is for home countries to take more responsibility for encouraging students to return home. According to Mestenhauser, some countries neglect their students who study in other countries. "Sometimes, students are just dumped in the U.S. and they never get a response from home" (Rudd, 1988).

Other countries do nothing to encourage students to return except to instill feelings of guilt at not returning. In Mestenhauser's view, countries must help maintain the students' loyalty to their country by, for example, paying for annual visits home.

Countries must also make returning home an attractive option by providing reasonable salaries and attractive employment opportunities for scholars and by providing adequate reference materials and libraries.

One example of a successful program is the cooperative arrangement between the University of Mahidol in Thailand and the Rockefeller Foundation, which proved successful in attracting home Thai scholars who had studied in the United States (Coleman, 1984). The University and the Foundation provided positions for the scholars returning home and offered salary supplements for good teaching and research. In addition, they provided funds for scientific equipment, libraries, and support services.

Other cooperative arrangements exist between the U.S. and foreign companies, the U.S. and foreign colleges and universities, and the U.S. and foreign governments. The purpose of all these cooperative projects is to provide on-going training for U.S. trained students and scholars. The hope is that such training will help provide an attractive work climate for returned students and scholars. Examples include the Citicorp/Indonesia Training Project sponsored by Citicorp bank, which provides advanced training in banking, and the Instituto Panamericano de Alta Direccion de Empressa, which is a graduate school of business cooperating with the Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

Home countries must also provide intellectuals and professionals with opportunities to respond creatively to the home nations needs. One Turkish economist complained that he was never asked for advice by his own government, only by international organizations. He believed that by being involved in the national development of Turkey he would "become part of Turkey" (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983). Such involvement strengthens returning professionals and scholars' ties to their home countries.

Home countries can also help strengthen returnees' ties at home by creating institutions for professional and intellectual communities such as the National Academies of Science, and by supporting their conferences and periodicals. In this way governments can facilitate activities upon which intellectual life depends (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

Host countries

Not only do home countries have responsibilities toward their students and scholars, so do educational institutions in the the host countries.

Host countries can assist returning professionals and scholars by 1) providing opportunities for their alumni to return to the host campus for continuing education, 2) dispatching faculty for lecture tours abroad, and 3) donating funds for the improvement of academic infrastructures in developing countries (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

Host universities can make efforts to provide Third-World students with an education relevant to their needs. In so doing, universities would better prepare students for returning to their home countries rather than for the U.S. job market. A study of an engineering department at a large U.S. university revealed "a definite mismatch between the needs of Third-World students and the institutional culture as embodied in department programs" (Lansdale 1984). For example, it was found that faculty did not use materials relevant to Third-World countries.

Faculty in U. S. institutions of higher education might provide a better transition to the job market at home by providing readings and assignments which explicitly require students to think about and apply what they have learned to situations at home (Rudd, 1988). Paige (1987), strongly argues

that foreign students in U. S. universities must learn to critically assess Western technologies and learn to analyze whether Western technology is applicable or inapplicable in the context of their societies. He envisions seminars in which both U.S. and foreign students "assess the applicability of specific approaches from their disciplines . . . and examine the cultural value orientations which underlie specific technologies and problem-solving practices in their disciplines" (Paige, 1987). He argues that such seminars would enrich the educational experiences of both U.S. and foreign students and increase their understanding of global problems and of development.

Han Suyin offers one final suggestion to the problem of Chinese professionals and scholars who remain abroad. She says, "If outstanding Chinese scholars want higher eduction in the United States, let them first spend five or ten years working in China so they will know their own country" ("Young Chinese," 1987).

China is responding to the problem of scholars and professionals who remain abroad by restricting who is permitted to leave China, where they go, and how long they can remain abroad. This response will be ineffective unless it also improves the work climate for those returning home. Those students trained abroad must believe that their hard earned education will be put to good use when they return in order that they may contribute to the modernization of Chinese society. As a Chinese student at Macalester College explains:

> *The best way to improve the situation in China and make China a stronger country is to go home. . . .China really needs to change the way people are thinking and to change the way some systems are working. Those who have been overseas, who have seen the pros and cons of different systems are really the people that should go back* ("Great," 1988).

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